POEMS YOU OUGHT TO KNOW

Whatever your occupation may be, and however crowded your hours with affairs, do not fail to secure at least a few minutes every day for refreshment of your inner life with a bit of poetry.—Prof. Charles Eliot Norton.

No. 530.

HOW THE OLD HORSE WON THE BET.

BY OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

Other selections from this author, his portrait, autograph and biographical sketch, have already been printed in this series. Dr. Holmes's poems are published by Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston and New York.

WAS on the famous trotting ground,
The betting men were gather'd round
From far and near; the "cracks" were there
Whose deeds the sporting prints declare;
The swift g. m. Old Hiram's nag,
The fleet s. h., Dan Pfeiffer's brag,
With these a third—and who is he
That stands beside his fast b. g.?
Budd Doble, whose catarrhal name
So fills the nasal trump of fame.
There, too, stood many a noted steed
Of Messenger and Morgan breed;
Green horses also, not a few—
Unknown as yet what they could do;
And all the hacks that know so well
The scourgings of the Sunday swell.

Blue are the skies of opening day;
The bordering turf is green with May;
The sunshine's golden gleam is thrown
On sorrel, chestnut, bay and roan;
The horses paw and prance and neigh;
Fillies and colts like kittens play,
And dance and toss their rippled manes
Shining and soft as silken skeins;
Wagons and gigs are ranged about,
And fashion flaunts her gay turnout:
Here stands—each youthful Jehu's dream—
The jointed tandem, ticklish team!
And there in ampler breadth expand
The splendors of the four-in-hand;
On faultless ties and glossy tiles
The lovely bonnets beam their smiles;
(The style's the man, so books avow;
The style's the woman, anyhow);
From flounces froth'd with creamy lace
Peeps out the pug dog's smutty face,
Or spaniel rolls his liquid eye,
Or stares the wiry pet of Skye—
O, woman in your hours of ease
So shy with us, so free with these!

"Come on! I'll bet you two to one
I'll make him do it!" "Will you? Done!"
What was it he was bound to do?
I did not hear, and can't tell you;
Pray listen till my story's through.

Scarce noticed, back behind the rest,
By cart and wagon rudely prest,
The parson's lean and bony bay,
Stood harness'd in his one-horse shay—
Lent to his sexton for the day.
(A funeral—so the sexton said;
His mother's uncle's wife was dead).
Like Lazarus bid to Dives' feast,
So look'd the poor forlorn old beast;
His coat was rought, his tail was bare,
The gray was sprinkled in his hair:
Sportsmen and jockeys knew him not,
And yet they say he once could trot
Among the fleetest of the town,
Till something crack'd and broke him down—
The steed's, the statesman's common lot!
"And are we then so soon forgot?"
Ah, me! I doubt if one of you
Has ever heard the name "Old Blue,"
Whose fame through all this region rung
In those old days when I was young!

"Bring forth the horse!" Alas! he show'd
Not like the one Mazeppa rode;
Scant-maned, sharp-back'd and shaky-kneed,
The wreck of what was once a steed—
Lips thin, eyes hollow, stiff in joints;
Yet not without his knowing points.
The sexton laughing in his sleeve,
As if 'twere all a make-believe,
Led forth the horse, and as he laugh'd
Unhitch'd the breeching from a shaft,
Unclasp'd the rusty belt beneath,
Drew forth the snaffle from his teeth,
Slipp'd off his head stall, set him free
From strap and rein—a sight to see!

So worn, so lean in every limb,
It can't be they are saddling him!
It is! His back the pigskin strides,
And flaps his lank rheumatic sides;
With look of mingled scorn and mirth
They buckle round the saddle girth;
With horsey wink and saucy toss
A youngster throws his leg across.
And so, his rider on his back,
They lead him, limping to the track,
Far up behind the starting point,
To limber out each stiffien'd joint.

As through the jeering crowd he pass'd,
One pitying look old Hiram cast;
"Go it, ye cripple, while ye can!"
Cried out unsentimental Dan;
"A fast-day dinner for the crows!"
Budd Dobie's scoffing shout arose.

Slowly, as when the walking beam
First feels the gathering head of steam,
With warning cough and threatening wheeze
The stiff old charger crooks his knees;
At first with cautions step sedate,
As if he dragg'd a coach of state;
He's not a colt; he knows full well
That time is weight and sure to tell;
No horse so sturdy but he fears
The handicap of twenty years.

As through the throng on either hand
The old horse nears the judges' stand,
Beneath his jockey's featherweight
He warms a little to his gait,
And now and then a step is tried
That hints of something like a stride.

"Go!"—Through his ear the summons stung,
As if a battle trump had rung;
The slumbering instincts long unstirr'd
Start at the old familiar word;
It thrills like flame through every limb—
What mean his twenty years to him?
The savage blow his rider dealt
Fell on his hollow flanks unfelt;
The spur that prick'd his staring hide
Unheeded tore his bleeding side;
Alike to him are spur and rein—
He steps a five-year-old again!

Before the quarter pole was pass'd,
Old Hiram said, "He's going fast."
Long ere the quarter was a half,
The chuckling crowd had ceased to laugh;
Tighter his frighten'd jockey clung
As in a mighty stride he swung,
The gravel flying in his track,
His neck stretch'd out, his ears laid back,
His tail extended all the while
Behind him like a rat-tail file!
Off went a shoe—away it spun,
Shot like a bullet from a gun;
The quaking jockey shapes a prayer
From scraps of oaths he used to swear;
He drops his whip, he drops his rein,
He clutches fiercely for a mane;
He'll lose his hold—he sways and reels—
He'll slide beneath those trampling heels!
The knees of many a horseman quake,
The flowers on many a bonnet shake,
Shouts arise from left to right,
"Stick on! stick on!" "Hould tight! hould tight!"
"Cling round his neck; and don't let go—
That pace can't hold—There! steady! whoa!"
But, like the sable steed that bore
The spectral lover of Lenore,
His nostrils snorting foam and fire,
No stretch his bony limbs can tire;
And now the stand he rushes by,
And "Stop him! stop him!" is the cry.
"Stand back! he's only just begun—
He's having out three heats in one!"
"Don't rush in front! he'll smash your brains;
But follow up and grab the reins!"
Old Hiram spoke. Dan Pfeiffer heard,
And sprang, impatient, at the word:
Budd Doble started on his bay
Old Hiram follow'd on his gray,
And off they spring, and round they go,
The fast ones doing "all they know."
Look! twice they follow at his heels,
As round the circling course he wheels,
And whirls with him that clinging boy
Like Hector round the walls of Troy.
Still on, and on, the third time round!
They're tailing off! they're losing ground!
Budd Doble's nag begins to fail!
Dan Pfeiffer's sorrel whisks his tail!
And see! in spite of whip and shout!
Old Hiram's mare is giving out!
Now for the finish! At the turn,
The old horse—all the rest astern—
Comes swinging in, with easy trot;
By Jove! he's distanced all the lot!
That trot no mortal could explain;
Some said, "Old Dutchman come again!"
Some took his time—at least, they tried,
But what it was could none decide;
One said he couldn't understand
What happen'd to his second-hand;
One said 2:10, that couldn't be—
More like two twenty-two or three;
Old Hiram settled it at last!
"The time was two—too dee-vil-ish fast!"

The parson's horse had won the bet;
It cost him something of a sweat;
Back in the one-horse shay he went,
The parson wonder'd what it meant,
And murmur'd, with a mild surprise
And pleasant twinkle of the eyes,
"That funeral must have been a trick,
Or corpses drive at double quick;
I shouldn't wonder, I declare,
If Brother Jehu made the prayer!"
And this is all I have to say
About that tough old trotting bay
Huddup! Huddup! g'lang, good day!
Moral for which this tale is told:
A horse can trot, for all he's old.

This ... ... the Times-Dispatch Sunday, October 11, 1903. One is published each day

THE LEES' VISITS TO RICHMOND AND LEXINGTON

RECOLLECTIONS OF A SCOUT.

The death of Fitzhugh Lee the other week recalls to my mind an interview I had with him when traveling round the Southern States shortly after the close of the great Confederate war of 1861-'65, in which he had commanded the cavalry of Northern Virginia. It was in Richmond that I met him. He was in the prime of life—a tall, stout, florid man, with a certain lordliness of carriage oftener met with in the South at that time than in the North.

The war had set the negroes free, in the course of conversation with him, I asked him about Southern feeling on the subject. He said: "It is not so much emancipation that we complain of as the way in which it has been brought about and the use that is being made of it." He added: "I think most people in the South expected that a time would come for emancipation, but it was a thing that needed time and patience."

When I inquired as to his uncle's (General R. E. Lee's) views about it, he said: "General Lee does not say much on political questions. But he was always for gradual emancipation. During the war he was in favor of arming the negroes and wrote about it. But his advice was only taken when it was too late."

I asked him what the Southern leaders thought of the position of this country during the war. "We looked anxiously in your direction," he replied. "We knew we had the sympathy of some classes there. But we suspected that Great Britain would never recognize a nation like ours that seemed to commit itself to slavery."

Shortly after my interview with General Fitzhugh Lee I went away up to Lexington to see his uncle and to visit the grave of Stonewall Jackson. The great ex-commander of the Confederate armies in Virginia was now acting as president of Washington College. "Lee's College" as it had come to be called, situated in what one gentleman in the hotel described as the "out squirts" of Lexington. When the war was over, General Lee had told his old officers and soldiers that they had all done their best and failed and that their wise and dutiful course now was to accept the arbitrament of war, to put aside all hostile feeling and accept whatever honest callings were open to them in civil life. He had shown a noble example by accepting the presidentship of the college at Lexington.

At the time of my visit, the number of students, formerly a mere handful, had increased to about four hundred. The professors with whom I had the opportunity of conversing all spoke of the striking influence that General Lee had exercised for good over them all and how easy discipline had become in spite of the fiery spirits of some of the students. It was one of Lee's duties as president, to admonish defaulters, and one of the professors declared to me that such was the profound veneration in which Lee was held throughout the South, that he believed there were students in college, who would rather shoot themselves than appear before Lee in disgrace.

My first meeting with Lee was in the room reserved for the use of the college president, where he was occupied for the greater part of the day in writing. I found him dressed in one of his old military coats, stripped of all its former decorations. A singularly noble looking man he was, tall, straight and soldier like with crisp hair turning white, short trimmed beard pointed at the chin and dark imperial looking eyes, very keen and searching. His manners were quiet and dignified and there was a good deal of the old English cavalier in his look and bearing.

I knew from what his son had told me that Lee was very reticent on political subjects, but I remember to this day how amused I was when sitting at table with Mrs. Lee and himself to notice—as I could not fail to do—the admirable delicacy and tact with which, as often as the conversation threatened to become political, he contrived to turn it into another channel. When, e. g., I broached the subject of the colored people, Lee, as if he were going to enter into the subject, remarked that they were flocking in great numbers into the towns; that I would see many of them in Lexington if I went about, as he hoped I would, there being several points in the town and its neighborhood that would be sure to interest me, some of which points he went on quite naturally to speak of, till the colored people were as far away from the line of conversation as if they had never been mentioned. When back to spend the evening at his house, the negroes happened to be referred to again, Lee, as if interested to know how far my experience had corroborated his former remark, said: "Did you see many of them to-day?" I said I had seen very few. "The rain must have kept them within doors," said Lee, adding: "The weather is unfortunate for your seeing our little town to advantage. But you must wait till it clears up and visit the Natural Bridge of Virginia. You could ride there and back in one day with a good horse," and he proceeded to describe a visit he himself had paid to the bridge, the negro silently vanishing from the conversation as before.

I noticed the same caution when the professors were present. Conversation went on briskly, but whenever political topics were introduced Lee became silent and allowed the conversation to go on without him. I was told that when direct inquiries were addressed to him on political questions his usual answer was that he was a soldier, not a politician.

On other questions he spoke freely. I remember when my nationality was referred to he said: "You will meet with many of your countrymen here. The Valley of Virginia is peopled with Scotch-Irish people who have come from Scotland by way of Ireland. They are a fine race. They have the courage and determination of the Scotch, with the dash and interpidity of the Irish. They make fine soldiers."

He said it was an old wish of his to visit Scotland, but it would never be realized now. Stonewall Jackson had been there some years before the war. He had often heard him speak of it.

In Lee's references to Jackson I was struck with the emphasis he placed upon his piety. It was impossible, indeed, to be long in Lee's company without observing how his own Christian character and principles revealed themselves in his manners and conversation. I remember with peculiar distinctness the solemnity with which at the supper table, standing before his family he asked God's blessing. I also remember when he was referring to a gentleman he wished me to see at Richmond his saying that he had rarely met with "a nobler or more Christian man." It was only a word but it showed by what standard he gauged a man's worth.

In 1899 I visited Virginia again. Lee had then been dead for nearly thirty years, but I found the memory of him as fresh and the reverence for him as great as ever. I was in Richmond when the anniversary of his birthday came around, and found that it was being observed as a State holiday. The banks, the State offices and the public schools were closed, and there was a great gathering of the Confederate veterans around the "camp fire," many of them wearing the old Confederate gray. In memory of the mighty conflict between two civilizations, in which they had taken part under Lee and Jackson and other great Confederate heroes.

But these memories no longer kindled the old bitterness and animosity. The feeling seemed more like that of a Highland gathering, roused to enthusiasm by the songs of "Bonnie Prince Charlie." The frank and universal recognition in the North as well as in the South of the splendid military genius of Lee and Jackson, and their greatness and nobility of character, had contributed to this new and kindlier feeling. So also had the action of the government during the war with Spain in assigning commands to conspicuous Southerners like Fitzhugh Lee and "Fighting Joe Wheeler," who had fought to the last under the Confederate flag. The change of feeling had been made all the easier by the great industrial and commercial development of the South since the close of the Civil War.

The question of the black and white races in the South was no doubt again becoming serious in a new form, but it was no longer being looked at as one of South vs. North, but as a great national question, requiring all the wisdom that the United States as a whole and the colored race as well as the white could contribute towards its pacific solution.

DAVID MACRAE.

Maxwell Park, Glasgow.

CUTTING WHEAT ON THE STAUNTON

Modern Scenes at the Home of John Randolph, of Roanoke.

(Special to The Times-Dispatch.)

RANDOLPH, VA., June 24.—The wheat harvest commenced to-day on Staunton View Plantation, the reaping being done with a Dearing Reaper, a most unusual looking machine, with its broad platform and whirling arms, reminding one of a flying machine in embryo.

Looking down from an eminence on a field of wavering grain, then at the wide swath made by the reaper, and the neat bundles ready to be shocked, the methods of the past and present are brought to mind, and the picturesque, in the shape of scythe and cradle are sacrificed for the cold-blooded labor-saving machine of to-day. Even Randolph, of Roanoke, himself, would be moved to wonder, could he return from "that boundless contiguity of shade, where he first lay buried, and see the swiftness with which a field of wheat is laid low, in this river girdled corner of his old dominion.

Encircled on three sides by the Staunton River the "Low Grounds" of this section give an abundant yield of corn. It is corn to the right of us, corn to the left of us, and corn for three miles down the river. The river hills and higher grounds are crowned with tobacco barns, several of which are vine covered, and picturesque, and are pointed out as Randolph's barns. The drawing shows one in the bend of the river, the vines ... ing the Virginia creeper. ... across the river from Staun... ...ew house is pelasing, showing the low hills and cultivated lands in Halifax. The thousands of acres on the Staunton River, now divided into three or four large plantations, were all owned by John Randolph, of Roanoke, as he is still called in the neighborhood, he having died in 1833. His house on "Roanoke" plantation is kept intact, and is used as an office by the present genial owner of the fine estate, Mr. C. Cheney, of Chicago.

Mr. Cheney has spent two years at "Roanoke," but has returned to Chicago, for the summer, where his sons are engaged in the engraving business.

All of the buildings put up by Randolph may be known by the substantial workmanship, and the high, pointed roof. One said to be one hundred years old is still in a good state of preservation, on this plantation.

Tobacco is growing finely, the shower of last week being just what was needed.

Mr. C. C. Paris is congratulated by his many friends on his re-election as superintendent of education for Charlotte county. He continues the duties of the office to the satisfaction of all. Several Charlotte teachers have asked for credentials from him to the School of Methods at Charlottesville, Va.

The State Summer School of South Carolina will be held at Clemson College, in the northwest part of the State, this year. Some teachers in South Side Virginia, are asking for special rates to attend that well known institution and school.

S. L. B.